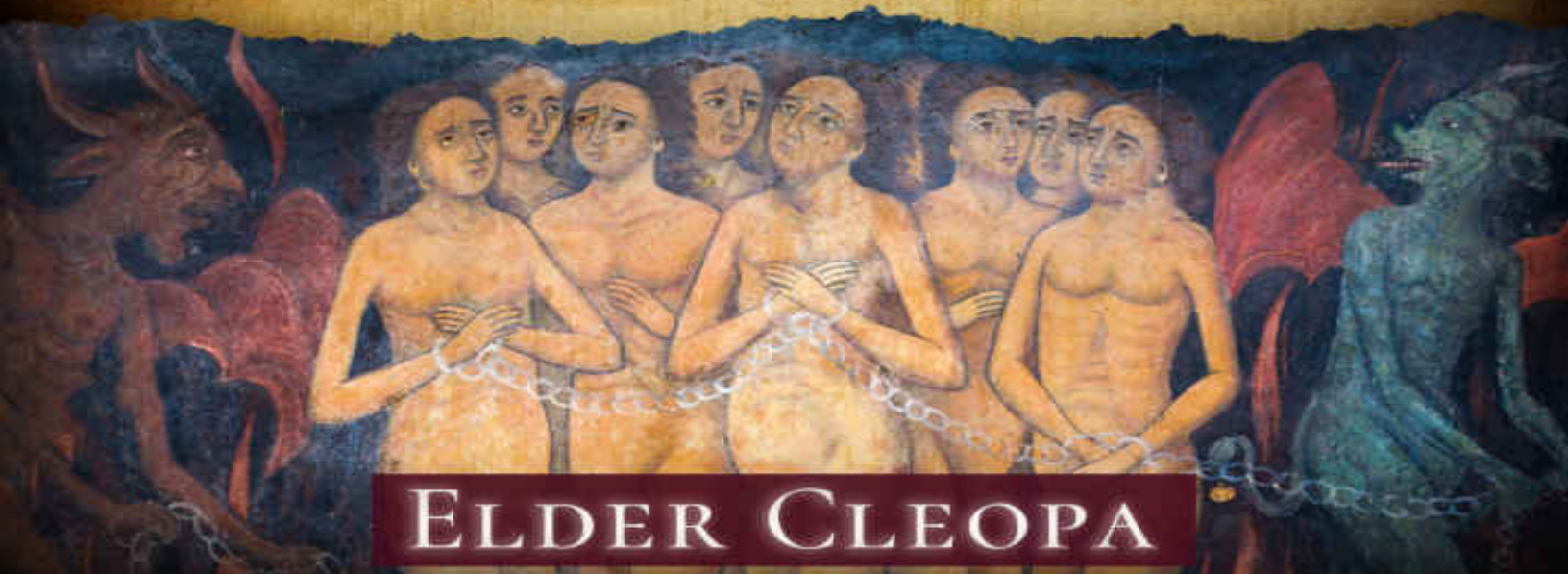
How Satan Deceives People



Elder Cleopa

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How Satan Deceives People - Elder Cleopa

“With every sin has the devil humiliated and submitted us, so that we may learn our subjugation. Therefore, those who know themselves and their state can crush Satan, the one who shattered them.”

- Avva Zosima -

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There was once a renowned Christian anchorite, named Ilarion, who lived in the parts of Alexandria. He was almost a hundred years of age. For years, he prayed to God: “Lord, show me how the devil deceives people so that whenever the faithful seek my advice, I can teach them: ‘Dear folks, beware of this and that.’ Lord, what is the method he uses to lure people away from the path of righteousness, and lead them straight into the depths of hell? How does he win more souls for hell than guardian angels for the Kingdom of Heaven?” The ascetic prayed for a year, then two, then three, but God did not answer him.

But on one night, when the moon was shining on the dark sky, and the monk was praying in his hut, the entrance door slowly opened by itself, and an angel appeared: a young man, handsome so, with a golden crown on his head, a golden staff in his hand and clothes like lightning. And so the angel asked:

“Father, what are you praying for?”

“I pray and ask our Savior to reveal to me how the devil deceives the people and leads them to hell.”

“Hear my words, father. Grab the Holy Cross and your rod, make the sign of the Cross unto yourself, and go into the meadow nearby, and when you arrive there, take a seat next to a tree. But do not be afraid of what you will see for I shall be by your side! And what you will see on this night, write it down for future generations, so they too can know how the devil deceives the people. Fear not, as you will witness terrible things!” And so, the angel disappeared.

The father learned that the happening was a sign from God, for the angel had taught him to arm himself with the sign of the Holy Cross. So he headed towards the meadow, calmly praying in his mind. When he arrived, a deafening silence was reigning in the air; the wind was not blowing, and the only things he could see were the stars and the moon. And like that, the old man took a seat under the nearest tree and waited.

All of a sudden, a royal throne appeared in the middle of the meadow, a

kind made of lightning and fire, and so the father wondered greatly. After the throne emerged, Satan himself arrived shortly after and sat on it.

His shoulders were like the anvil, his skin like ink, with tiny bear-like hair, with big and sharp claws, with four pairs of horns and a tail so long as 300 feet; his eyes were shining like diamonds, and a river of fire sprang from his mouth. He was wearing a crown made entirely of snakes and held a staff in the guise of a dragon.

At the sight of the demon, the father made the sign of the Holy Cross on himself. From his throne, Satan clapped three times, and millions of devil regiments, squads, and battalions filled up the night sky, from the ground to the stars. Massive generals were standing on the left and right side of the throne, with three pairs of horns, and shoulders covered with spikes.

When the monk saw so much bitterness and misery there, he recalled the words of the angel who said: “Fear not.” And so, he armed himself with the sign of the Holy Cross and waited in silence.

Numerous as the sand on the seashore, the devils formed lines and surrounded the throne. Then, Satan stood up and said: “Listen, all of you, fellow demons. I have summoned you here, in the middle of the night, for I wish to ask something of you. Do you know what I am speaking of?”

And one of them replied: “We don’t, your darkness!”

“Hear why I’ve summoned you: Every one of you come forth — who among you knows the best way to deceive and bring people to my kingdom? Let him who knows show me his tricks, and how he drags people towards the torments of hell. What is your plan, your scheme? Reveal to me how cunning you are in deceiving the souls of men!

“To him who astonishes me and conceives a devilish plot that impresses me, behold, I shall grant him my throne, and he will rule all of hell for three minutes; I shall make him king of the inferno, high general above others.”

Everyone was trembling; everyone was frightened very. All were standing and shaking before Satan. It was then when a wimpy imp stepped forward, with a gray beard, with two tiny deer-like horns and a crooked nose, looking like a dying duck in a thunderstorm.

“Hail, oh Lord of Darkness!”

“What is your name, demon?”

“Furfur, sire!”

“Well, fellow imp, how do you deceive people and bring them to hell?”

“Your gloominess, I advise the man this: ‘Old man, be half-and-half — do go to church or the monastery, also do fast for a while, but don’t fall aboard with the devil either. Party a bit, dance a little, go to the clubs, swear, go to a pub and get drunk, smoke a couple of cigarettes, so-and-so. You are only human; you need to live your life! Do some work for God, yes, but also keep in with the devil.’

“With such method, I have deceived many people, sire. I send them evil thoughts, for other powers I do not possess. No other power has been given to us, demons in hell. God has given the angels in heaven the ability to send men good thoughts. The only power we have is to send people wicked thoughts and ideas to do cruel things. But to force them, we cannot. For God has given them willpower and the ability of self-restraint. We cannot force a man to sin; unless he is a fool and welcomes the evil thoughts we send him.

“And like that, I have gained many souls. When the sermon finishes and people leave the church, some make a stop at the local pub where everybody gathers: relatives, friends, etc. And I send men a thought or two, and they believe it’s their own: ‘I could use another drink, another cigarette!’ Because of this, people stumble and no longer find use in the morning sermons they took part in at the church; for in the evening, they return to our wrongdoings, yes. And such, I do with everyone.”

Then Satan asked:

“Many have you deceived?”

“Many, your darkness, yes!”

“You have deceived the ones stupider than you, and your methods are worthless!”

“Sire?”

“You tell people to wander here and there, sometimes at church and other times at the pub, at parties but also at holy places. You whisper them to pray, but afterward to behave unrighteously. I tell you what! In the Gospel, the words of Christ are written: ‘No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.’

“Admittedly, you urge people to do sinful things, but because they are not spiritually ready yet. Thus, the man falls for your mischief a couple of times, but after a while, the guardian angel will come and send him a good thought: ‘Beloved soul, you cannot walk on two paths; either you seek God, or you choose to serve the devil.’ And so, afraid of God’s punishments, the man will give in: ‘Well now, I must choose one path, for there is no Salvation walking on two paths!’ And so he will continue sinning for a while, but then he awakes; he avoids the pub and drinks no more! Instead, he confesses to the priest. And you gain nothing. Did it ever happen such?”

“It did, your darkness!”

“There! Did I not say you deceived the ones stupider than you?! Your methods are useless!”

And so Satan ordered one of his generals, a beast with four pairs of horns and a fifteen-feet long tail to grab the wimpy imp and throw him into the Barathrum. The Barathrum is a river of black fire, billions of times hotter than the one on Earth. The devil did not like the Furfur’s method. Instead of thanking the imp, the lord of darkness threw him into the Barathrum! Now, all the demons were shaking in terror. The devil wanted to hear a better plan.

“Another one, come forth! Reveal us your method of deceiving people!”

A demon with a grizzled gray hair and two pairs of horns, hideous as well, with donkey-like ears and crooked legs, stepped forward:

“Hail, oh Lord of Darkness!”

“What is your name, old demon?”

“Gamigin, sire!”

“Well there, Gamigin, how do you deceive people?”

“Like this, your highness. I tell them: ‘There is no such thing as God or Satan, there is no angel, no hell, no heaven, no everlasting torments, no eternal glory; everything that is, lies here, on this planet! If you have food to eat and water to drink, and if you have riches and a house to live in, or if people respect you, then that is heaven. And if not, you are in hell. That’s all there is to it!

“And many have listened to you?”

“Many.”

“You lunkhead, you idiot! You are even dumber than the previous demon. You too have deceived the stupider than you, the simple-minded people, not the ones who read the Scriptures. For the Scriptures reveal the existence of God and Satan, of angels and hell, of everlasting torments and eternal glory, of punishments of sins and rewards for good deeds. Who could trust you when all the Scriptures, apostles, and prophets say otherwise?! The Scripture is packed with such teachings and the ones who study it, do not believe you. Furthermore, God placed the sentiment of consciousness in the man’s soul when He created him. No matter how atheist a man might be, he still feels an invisible power in his soul, namely his consciousness. It scolds him when he sins and rejoices when he does good. And the voice of consciousness cannot be a reflection of the matter, of something material, for it is of invisible nature.

“The consciousness is God’s voice within men, and whenever the man sins, it scolds him: ‘Why have you done such?’ Nobody must see him sin nor must punish him for doing such, for whenever man disobeys God’s laws, this invisible law, namely the law of nature or consciousness placed by God in Adam at first, lectures him immediately.

“Sometimes it scolds him so harshly that, if the sin is too great, it can cast the man into despair. Then, the word of the Psalms comes to past and fulfills itself: ‘When Thou dost chasten a man with rebukes for sin; When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makes his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man is vanity.’ (Ps. 39, 11). It means that his faith diminishes because of the torments of his

consciousness, and thus, he cannot eat well nor sleep well nor pray well. He no longer has peace in his heart. The consciousness gnaws him continuously: 'Why have you done this and that, why have you anger God with such sins?'

"So in vain you tell him that there is no God, for his consciousness tells him otherwise, and so do The Scriptures. You say you teach man that there is no God, no devil, no angel, no hell, no heaven, but The Scriptures are full of testimonies that prove the existence of God, of angels, of everlasting torments and eternal glory.

"And you are a bigger idiot and haven't contributed with much to the kingdom of hell; You are worthless! You didn't do a good job, Gamigin. Generals! Cast this no-good demon into the Barathrum, for he is stupid and did not bring many to my kingdom. Another one!"

And so it was that the second demon who came before Satan, presenting his method of deceiving people, had the same fate as the previous one who taught men to go both to church and the pub, to do both God's will as well as Satan's. Instead of honoring him and make him general over many legions of demons, the lord of darkness gave Gamigin a hard beating and cast him in the depths of hell, for the imp was stupid and knew not how to deceive people. He might have fooled them, but he brought too few souls into hell!

Satan was sitting on his throne, impatiently waiting for another one to come forth.

"If the next one who comes forth presents me a devilish plan to win over the souls of men for the kingdom of hell better than the ones before, I will make him general over many devils and grant him my throne, and he shall rule all of hell for three minutes."

After Satan finished his words, no demon wanted to step forward anymore out of the many legions present. They were afraid to end up like the other two; instead of praises, they would be beaten and thrown into the river of fire. And so, silence settled in the forest and the meadow.

After a while, an old humpbacked devil comes forth, with three pairs of horns, a hooked nose, with one leg from a duck and the other from a horse.

He had the symbols of hell on his forehead, and his tail was so long that it stretched all the way to the ends of the earth. And so he came before Satan and his throne and said:

“Greetings, your darkness!”

“What is your name, demon?” asked Satan.

“Orobas, sire!”

“Hmm, I see you’re old and hunched. I suppose you have some tricks up your sleeve for deceiving people and bringing them into my kingdom.”

“Not even your darkness knows what I know!”

“Really? Spit it out, old man! I sense you are an old dog at fooling people.”

“Not even you know what I know! I have a catch with which I gain many souls for hell, for I have grown old fighting for thousands of years with the souls of men.”

“And how did you manage to do that, demon?”

“Haha, do you think I am as stupid as Furfur to tell people: ‘Go to church but go to the pub as well,’ or as the other fool who said: ‘There is no God nor devil?’ We all know the sentiment of God has been planted in his consciousness from the beginning of time!

“This is all I tell them: ‘Yes, there is a God, and a demon, and an angel, there is even everlasting torment for sins and eternal glory for good deeds. But my friend, there is still enough time left! Are you nuts? Are you seriously going to repent starting today?

“To a child, I say: ‘Don’t worry kid, you’ll do good deeds later when you’re older.’ To a teenager: ‘Young man, you have a lot going on at the moment. You are still young; you need to get married, buy a house, experience life and take in all the world has to offer!’ But then the angel comes and says: ‘You need to pray more!’ So I deceive the fellow: ‘Don’t you ever waste your youth praying, in vain! You need to live your life! After you get married and settle in, you can think about repentance of sins. For now, eat and drink, party and have fun, sin as much as you can, for you are young. God will forgive you, for He knows man’s helplessness. Leave repentance

for another time!' I teach people to postpone their repentance for tomorrow, and then for the day after tomorrow, and so on and so forth.

"When the man sees a poor beggar, the angel tells him: 'Give him something, anything!' I tell him: 'Forget it, man, this guy isn't poor. Are you going to give money to all the punks? Leave it for later, when you have some to spare. You can't do alms now, forget about it! Maybe, when you see a poorer one, you will consider it.' And so the beggar will not ask him anymore.

"The angel tells the man: 'Repent of your sins!' I tell him: 'You will repent on your death bed! Do you seriously want to do it now, and be the laughing stock of your friends? Do you want the world to say you've gone mad, like the old ladies? Didn't you notice the churches are full of them? Do you want to pray and loose so many hours asking God for forgiveness? Later, you have work to do now. Behold, you have children to take care of, a house to build, a job to go to. You have so much to think about!' And so, I bury him with all the earthly worries and keep telling him to postpone his repentance.

"Sometimes, the angel comes and tells the man: 'Repent and sin no more, don't commit adultery, don't get drunk anymore, don't smoke, don't curse!' And I tell him: 'What, starting now? Later! Go and confess to a priest when you feel your time on earth is up, and he will absolve you of your sins. And that's it. Even The Scriptures say that your life should end in virtue, but until then ... you can live however you want!'

"When the angel comes and tells him: 'Poor man, honor the annual Lents, start fasting Wednesdays and Fridays!' I tell him: 'Fast not, for you will lose your health! You must work, gather riches, you have mouths to feed. You will start fasting when you retire.'

"And so the angel keeps telling men and women alike who have the terrible habit of smoking: 'Put down the cigarette, the tobacco. You will get sick. Don't you see the house is full of smoke? The kids will get sick, and you are wasting your money. Can't you see everything is expensive?' But I sneak in and tell them: 'Sure, you will quit smoking, but do you see this pack of cigarettes? You just paid for it. You won't throw it away now, will

you? You must finish it.'

"Thus and so, the angel whispers to the drunk: 'Brother, put away the bottle, and leave the pub. Your wife and children are waiting for you at home!' But I tell him: 'Sure, quit drinking, but look, you just met an old friend who wants to buy you a drink. You can't deny free alcohol, come on!' And so, I delay his time to repent.

"In the morning, the angel tells the man: 'Wake up an hour or a half-an-hour earlier, read the morning prayers; you even have time to read the Akatist of the Lady Theotokos. You are young and healthy; you can even do some prostrations and read a couple of Psalms.' But I come and deceive him: 'Do you know how sweet the morning sleep is? Five more minutes, and then you'll get up.' So he turns in bed, and when the time comes to get up he says: 'Oh no, it is so late! I have to hurry up and go to school, work, college.' I tell him: 'Worry not; you will pray after you return from school, work. There is time.'

"And when he comes home, the angel reminds him again: 'Brother, you did not pray this morning, pray now for half-an-hour, at least.' And I come and whisper to his ears: 'You're hungry. Eat and quench your thirst.' Then I add: 'You cannot pray with a full belly, and if you think about it, you are tired. Get some rest and then pray.' He eats, drinks, rests and when he wakes up, he says: 'Oh no! It is late. I have to wash the clothes, clean the house. The wife will soon be here; the children need to eat. I have to fix the car, to study for the exam.' And so I come and tell him: 'Worry not, you'll pray tonight.'

"At night, when he is finished with the chores, the angel comes and tells him: 'Brother, the whole day you did not pray. At least now grab the Bible and read it a bit.' And I, Orobas, come and tell him: 'Sure, you can pray, but first check what's on the TV. You don't want to miss anything important, do you?' And when he turns it on, I say: 'Wow, there's a game, movie or show...' And an hour passes, two, three, four, five, and it's already midnight: 'What time is it? Oh well, only monks at the monastery pray at this hour. Forget it; you can pray in the morning...' And in the morning, it's the same thing all over again.

“And whenever there’s a holiday, the angel says to the man: ‘Brother, today is Sunday, it’s a holiday. Come to the church, like the rest of the Christians.’ But I come and convince him: ‘Poor man, the whole week you studied, worked. You are tired. Stay home and relax. Watch TV, or fix the washing machine or the radio. Don’t you see how full the church is? There is no room to breathe in it; there are no empty benches to sit on. At least at home, you can sit in your comfortable chair, and smoke or drink a beer. Worry not; you can go to church next Sunday, or on Pascal and a bit on Christmas. Anyway, it’s sufficient that you went to church last year.’

“And so, everybody listens to me and postpones the day of their repentance. But the Scriptures say the opposite and the Holy Spirit awakens people: ‘If today you will hear His voice, let your hearts sadden not.’ Their conscience expresses God’s will. It rebukes them for their sins: ‘You man, sin no more! Do not steal, do not commit adultery, do not get drunk, do not smoke, do not swear, do not search for scandals, do not lie.’ God commands people to seek repentance now and every day, but we tell them: ‘Not today, but tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow; in your old age.’

“And we trick them: ‘Give me today, and tomorrow is yours!’ And like that, the sin belongs to the man; if thou take a nail and hammer it once or twice in the wood, thou can still pull it out. And if thy thou hammers the nail halfway, it becomes harder to pull out. But if thy thou hammers it completely, thou must crack the wood!

“Such is with the sin! It becomes part of the human nature through habit. And after I teach the man to be lazy and sinful, I stand aside and laugh at him. I needn’t do more. He gets used to sinning; the transgressions become part of him, so he does them out of his own will. I only stand and laugh. The beginning is difficult, for I have to teach him how to postpone doing good deeds for tomorrow, for the day after tomorrow, for his old age, for his last years of life, etc. And by delaying, he learns to live with the sin.

“And if the man does not stop sinning today, when the sin is weaker, as time passes, it will become harder and harder for him to grow out of it.

“Have you ever seen rust in the brass? If you cleanse the brass and polish it every day, it will shine like gold! But if you neglect it for years, it will start

to rust, becoming impossible to clean, unless you melt it. Such is with the soul that grows old into sin. If the man does not abandon the sin today, he should not think it will be easier to abandon it tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow. As time passes, the sin grows older and becomes part of his human nature, and with great effort can he put it off!

“According to the canonical laws of the Church, habit is the tenth step of the sin and after that follows despair, the next to last step. And when his wickedness has become part of him, a habit of his — one, two, or ten years, no matter how long it takes — he is mine forever! And that is my method of deceiving people; thousands and millions of people postpone the repentance of their sins, and all of them are bound to their wrongdoings; for the sin that has not been put off today, will only grow stronger tomorrow, next week, next month, next year. And when the man finally wants to repent, the sin springs and overwhelms him: ‘Are you nuts? All these years we have lived together! You cannot abandon me now! What else is there? Live as I tell you for I am part of you!’

“As I told you before, sire, I misled and deceived many, many souls with this only devilish thought: ‘There is enough time to repent and do good later, don’t be a fool to start now!’

“So I say to you, your darkness, this is my mischievous method, and I have an army of hundreds of thousands of demons under my command whom I teach the same strategy. And I send them all over the world to find and whisper to the man: ‘There is enough time for doing good. Tomorrow, next month, next year, in your old age.’ And I have succeeded and keep succeeding. Go and see how many souls I have brought to your kingdom with this method!”

So then Satan stood up from his throne and clapped his hands:

“Orobas’s method is the best method. Listen, all of you, this is the one: Teach the man to sin first, and then make him postpone his repentance and good deeds for another time. For he gets used to the wrongdoings and will do good deeds no more. Now, there...”

Satan took a step aside from his throne and invited Orobas to sit on it. He offered him his crown of snakes and said:

“Attention, all demons, let us all congratulate Orobas for he has found the best method of deceiving people.”

And they all gathered around Orobas and started singing and congratulating him. The mountains were roaring at the sound of their tongues. Then Satan placed the crown on Orobas’s head and said:

“Well done, old chap, you have given us the best method to deceive people — then Satan turned to the gathering— Go now, legions of demons, use the advice shared by Orobas and gain as many souls as you can for my kingdom. They will be tortured here with us forever and in the ages of ages. If one says: ‘There is a God,’ you reply: ‘Yes, there is, but forget about seeking forgiveness. Tomorrow. Next week. In your old age. Do you really want to confess today? Do you really want to take Holy Communion today? You have time! Leave it for tomorrow!’ For if you teach them such, they will listen and will be bound to their sin, and thus, go to hell!”

After witnessing all of this, the monk saw Satan clapping three times and disappearing like a spark in the sky, together with all his demons. And so, the hermit was astonished by what he saw and heard, by how Satan instructed his disciples of hell on how to convince people to delay their salvation.

And then, the angel of God appeared and said:

“Did you see, father? For many years you have prayed and asked God to show you how Satan deceives people and takes them into his kingdom! Behold, you have seen with your own eyes, and heard with your own ears. You have seen how one says: ‘Go to church but also to the local pub,’ and another: ‘There is no God.’ But you’ve also heard Orobas’s plan: ‘You have time. Repent and do good later.’

“Now, return to your hut, grab a notebook and write down everything you’ve seen and heard, so that the future generations may learn about Satan’s devilish practices. For the whole world must know that the best way in which demons gain souls for the kingdom of darkness is to teach people to postpone their repentance for tomorrow, for next year, from their youth to their old age, on their death bed, and like that, to deceive them all.”

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And so, the demons' wicked plan to gain souls for the kingdom of hell has been recorded. I was a child, about thirteen-fourteen years old when I first read this book and since then, I kept remembering it. And now, by the will of God, this book has reached you. Keep in mind that if we have thoughts of postponing our repentance and good deeds for tomorrow, or next week or next year, it is the work of Orobas.

"Have you ever noticed green rust in the brass?" asked Saint Ephrem the Syrian. "If it rusts, the brass cannot be cleansed. Such is with the sin— the older it gets, the stronger it binds our souls, leading us to eternal damnation."

Therefore, if the angel tells you: 'Brother, come to the monastery,' you must go. If you postpone it for next time, Orobas has swayed you. If your thoughts advise you: 'Confess all your childhood sins, for you might die and remain sinful,' but another voice comes and whispers: 'Forget it, man, leave it for tomorrow!" — that is Orobas. If you hear in your mind: 'Brother, put aside the cigarettes, do not steal nor get drunk,' but another thought quickly comes and says: 'Well now, grab another drink, smoke another cigarette,' — that is Orobas. If the angel says: 'Brother, wake up in the middle of the night and say Our Father seven times, and do a couple of prostrations,' but you hear another voice: 'No, the sleep is more important now, you can do them tomorrow,' — that is Orobas.

So, brothers, let us remember: every time we are inclined to postpone our repentance and doing good, then we must know it is the advice with which Orobas gains our soul and takes it to hell.

How To Do Good Deeds And Cultivate Kindness

-Advice from Avva Zosima-

A man wishes to learn a new skill. In the beginning, he gets tired quickly, ruins the work material, and then throws it away. Yet, he does not abandon the work, and despite throwing the material away many times, he starts over, proving to the master his willpower. If he sulked and quit, he wouldn't learn the skill. But if he works to his exhaustion and shows patience, and despite being scolded numerous times for his mistakes he still sticks to his work and runs not away, and with God's help, he will accomplish his tasks and learn the new skill effortlessly.

Such is with the spiritual things as well. If a man wishes to do a good deed, he must not assume in his mind that it will be simple nor easy, for it is helpless to think so. But instead, he must take the first step. And even if in the beginning he will make many errors, he must not abandon his work or become lazy, for in this way he will accomplish nothing. But instead, he must start again; like the man who wishes to learn a new skill. And if he will have patience and not become lazy, then God will look down to his willpower and see his effort and grant him the ability to do everything, effortlessly, as I mentioned before.

The secret lies in this: If one fails, one must not despair, but try again and again.

Such is the work of those who wish to do the good. All good deeds require effort and time. It is in our willpower to seek and cherish the effort, but we also need God's help. For if God does not reward our willpower, our efforts would be in vain; like the peasant who sweats his farm. He digs and sows and prepares the soil, but if God does not give rain over his crops, his efforts would be in vain.

And so our prayers and efforts are in need of God's help, which we attract to our use. And if we dawdle in times of prayer, or play the giddy goat, dodging our efforts, how can God look down on our work, for we bring nothing worthy and, thus, receive nothing in return? For the Lord seeks our willpower and grants us His divine gifts only to the best of our abilities.